BORDER 2012: U.S.- MEXICO ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAM

REGIONAL WORKGROUP NEWSLETTER

CALIFORNIA/BAJA CALIFORNIA Fall 2007

California/Baja California Regional Workgroup

By Editing Committee

As part of the Border 2012 Program's commitment to provide information to border stakeholders, the California/Baja California Workgroup Newsletter aims to keep border residents, legislators, and partners informed on the program's progress. The annual newsletter looks back at the accomplishments and issues of the past year and gives the reader background as well as a source for more information. In addition, there's an updated contact list of the seven regional task force leaders and Regional Work Group chairs, to give readers an opportunity to actively participate in the Border 2012 Program.

This issue marks the program's midpoint and highlights several new accomplishments and partnerships that directly affect California's and Baja California's border communities. As the Border 2012 Program continues to benefit residents of this border region, readers can access news and updates at the program website, **www.epa.gov/border2012**. Readers with any questions, comments, and/or suggestions regarding this newsletter are encouraged to contact us by phone at 619-235-4765 (EPA's San Diego Border Office). ■

Tijuana Estuary, Baja California, México

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Border People: Co-Chairs of the California/Baja California Regional Workgroups

In the previous California/Baja California Regional Workgroup Newsletter we highlighted the work and perspectives of two Co-chairs that administer the workgroup within the Border 2012 program, Enrique Villegas, Secretary of the Secretariat for Environmental Protection for the State of Baja California, and Laura Yoshii, Deputy Regional Administrator for EPA's Pacific Southwest Region. In this edition we are highlighting and welcoming a new member and Co-Chair of the Regional Workgroup and his representative partner organization. This will give readers a personal look inside the people who are working to solve environmental challenges that border communities face in the California/Baja California region. We plan on continuing these profiles and updates in future newsletters. ■

Using Indicators to Track Environmental Conditions and Trends and Program Progress

By Sandra Duque, EPA, and Vance Fong, EPA Region 9

The recently released State of the Border Region 2005 is the first of a series of environmental indicator reports produced by the U.S.-Mexico Border 2012 program. These indicators track environmental conditions and trends for water, air, land, public health, emergency preparedness and response, and enforcement and compliance in the U.S.-Mexico border region.

What role do indicators play in Border 2012?

Indicators are an integral and fundamental component of Border 2012. When the United States and Mexico established concrete goals for improving environmental quality and health along the border, they also committed to using sound indicators to accurately measure progress. The indicators focus attention on the key environmental issues that the program is seeking to address, including goals, objectives, and results of the many Border 2012 activities.

The process of developing the indicators involved a collaborative effort between the United States and Mexico, engaging federal, regional, state, and local governments as well as academic institutions, non-governmental organizations and others in planning and implementing activities to improve border environmental quality.

Key Messages in the Report

- In 2000, the percentage of households with access to piped drinking water indoors was 93% or higher in the U.S. Access in Mexican communities ranged from 61% to 84%.
- The number of days in 2005 in which air quality exceeded particulate matter (PM10) standards ranged from none in the Lower Rio Grande Valley to 43 days in the Mexicali/Imperial Valley region.
- As of December 2005, over two million tires had been removed from five border region waste sites. This includes the complete cleanup of the INNOR tire pile, resulting in the removal of 425,000 tires. Removed tires were used in cement kilns as tire-derived fuel, in asphalt as crumb rubber, and in erosion control embankments, among other creative uses.
- Fourteen out of fifteen sister city pairs along the border have established Sister City Binational Emergency Response Plans. The plans provide local emergency response teams with a mechanism for cooperatively addressing issues and concerns, and recommending emergency response planning, exercises, and training.
- The number of enforcement actions on the U.S. side of the border region declined to 85 in 2004 from 110 in 2003. However, the total dollar value of penalties increased to over $3 million in 2004 compared to less than $1.5 million in 2003. Between 2001 and 2004, Mexico's Annual Environmental Program of Inspection found 1,077 serious violations among the 11,059 inspected border facilities.

Next Steps

The next State of the Border Region report is expected to be released in 2008. The Border Indicators Task Force wants to develop additional environmental and health indicators and sharpen existing ones based on sound data. Expanding the current set of indicators will allow for more comprehensive communication on how the border region is responding to environmental pressures. The Border 2012 program is committed to continuously improving the quality, timeliness, and comprehensiveness of the indicators so that improvements in public health and environmental conditions along the border can be better understood. For this effort to be successful, on the ground expertise from border states, tribes, and partner organizations is important.

Further Information

Further information on State of the Border Region 2005 and the Border 2012 program can be found at the Border 2012 web site: **www.epa.gov/border2012** ■

Regional Workgroup Welcomes New Co-Chair from SEMARNAT

Baja California Delegate for the Secretariat for Environmental Protection and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT)

The Regional Workgroup welcomes Lic. Luis Alfonso-Torres Torres as the SEMARNAT representative. Mr. Torres brings a wealth of experience to the Workgroup. He received his bachelor's degree in business administration from the Autonomous University of Baja California in 1987. He has worked for the Baja California Department of Planning and Budget, and for the State of Baja's Public Works Commission. Mr. Torres began his new position as the SEMARANT Delegado for Baja California on February 7, 2007.

Concerning his new position, Mr. Torres made the following comment: "Starting my new responsibility as the Delegado of SEMARNAT, I set for myself the enormous challenge to give my children a new future: a world where they can swim in its waters with the peace of mind that the waters are clean, that they can breathe the air without the fear that it is polluted, that they may camp out because beautiful forests have been preserved, that they can fish because several species were once protected and were given the opportunity to reproduce. In summary, I hope to give them a better world to live in. I know this is an ambitious goal, but I have the peace of mind knowing that many people on this earth are giving their best efforts to protect the environment and preserve natural resources." ■

First Border 2012 Sister City Exercise Led by Civil Protection of Baja California

By Barbara Maco, EPA Region 9

To ensure that both the Borderwide Joint Contingency Plan and the Sister City Contingency Plans authorized by the 1983 U.S./Mexico La Paz Agreement are up to date and can be implemented during emergencies, binational exercises are conducted by federal, state and local agencies. The most likely scenarios are developed and the agencies in charge simulate a response, either in the field or indoors (table top exercise). Results or "After Action Reports" are prepared and set the stage for Plan revision or protocols that could strengthen the involvement of the critical responders (such as medical agencies) examine the Incident Command System (ICS), shorten response time, improve cleanup and further protect the public health and environment of border communities.

Table top exercise in Heber, CA

On November 14, 2006 over 80 federal state and local stakeholders (3/4 from Mexico) met in Heber CA to conduct a table top exercise of the 2005 Emergency Contingency Plan for the Sister Cities of Imperial County, California and Mexicali, Baja California. This was the first Border 2012 exercise to be lead by a Mexican Agency, Civil Protection of Baja California.

The attendees included U.S. and Mexican representatives from city, county and state health, civil protection, environmental and law enforcement agencies, fire chiefs, police chiefs, Red Cross and C4 (similar to 911 in the United States). Also attending were four representatives from Customs Border Protection, three representatives from Aduanas, and four from NORTHCOM. The day before in Mexicali, 32 stakeholders received Incident Command System Training Series 700. Both the exercise and the ICS capacity building were part of the 4 sister City collaboration of Imperial/Yuma/Mexicali and San Luis Rio Colorado to leverage resources for responding successfully to an emergency and protect the public health of this 4 state binational border community of 3.2 million residents. ■

Protecting Border Communities Through Sustainable Emergency Preparedness

By Barbara Maco, EPA Region 9

Goal Five of the Bi-national Border 2012 Program is to reduce the risk of public exposure to hazardous materials as a result of an accidental or intentional release. During an emergency there can be much confusion and chaos, as the Hurricane Katrina aftermath so tragically demonstrated. The ability to minimize casualties, prevent increased damage and protect the environment during response and rescue efforts greatly depends on the ability of emergency responders to access needed resources and deploy trained personnel. The Baja California Emergency Management Institute (EMI), a public/private bi-national partnership for sustainable emergency preparedness in the U.S./Mexico border region, is helping to achieve that goal. In April 2006, the partnership of the Baja California Emergency Management Institute grew stronger with the signing of a formal Memorandum of Collaboration at the Border 2012 National Coordinators Conference. The number of partners increased from two to nine

EMI Partners include:

- Baja California State Civil Protection
- Tijuana Fire and Civil Protection Department
- Mexico Attorney for Environmental Protection (PROFEPA)
- Autonomous State University of Baja California (UABC)
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
- County of San Diego
- State of California Specialized Training Institute
- CANCINTRA Tijuana
- Pro-Bomberos Tijuana Association.

Currently the University of Baja California serves as the fiscal and organizational coordinator for the institute, with critical leadership provided by the Mexico Attorney for Environmental Protection (PROFEPA) Delegate and the Director of the Baja California State Civil Protection.

David Cerón, Hazardous Materials Supervisor from the Tijuana Fire and Civil Protection Directorate assisting a student in Level A Personal Protective Equipment.

The B.C. EMI Objectives are:

- Support/expand current efforts to provide a full range of training for emergency responders, for both government and industry.
- Establish institutional, organizational and financial infrastructure for sustainable program management.
- Develop certified academic programs and bi-national standardization skills and procedures.
- To plan future programs that will include other hazards, such as bio-terrorism, as well as research and risk reduction.

From September to November of 2006, 265 government and industry stakeholders (56% from Mexico, 44% from the U.S.) were trained in five bi-national, bilingual sessions by the institute, including three cross-media efforts in Emergency Preparedness/Response, Risk Management and Pollution Prevention. Equally impressive, in December the institute established the first standardized curriculum series, formally certified by UABC. EMI priorities for 2007 are to expand certified standardized training, especially to industries whose employees are usually the first responders to chemical releases at their respective facilities. Adequate emergency preparedness can make the difference between life and death, environmental protection or massive damage to land, air, and waters. The importance of properly trained responders is crucial not only to protecting the victims of a chemical reslease but also to minimize the dangers faced by emergency personnel on the scene. ■

New Mexicali Wastewater Treatment Plant Benefits the U.S.

By Doug Liden, EPA Region 9

A new wastewater treatment plant was recently completed 16 miles south of Mexicali in an uninhabited area known as "Las Arenitas." The estimated 15 million gallons per day of sewage that once flowed untreated into the New River and into the United States is now treated, disinfected, and discharged into a series of man-made lakes. When the outfall is completed later this year, the water will be carried by a series of irrigation canals 28 miles southward to the Rio Hardy, which is a tributary to the Colorado River Delta. This additional freshwater is expected to significantly improve water quality in the Rio Hardy. Using EPA Border 2012 funds, the Centro de Investigación en Alimentación y Desarrollo (CIAD) will continue to monitor water quality in the river to verify these improvements.

EPA Administrator Steven Johnson, EPA Regional Administrator Wayne Nastri, and EPA Project Manager Susan Cox visit the new Mexicali Wastewater Treatment Plant

Mexico's President Felipe Calderón officially inaugurated the newly completed Las Arenitas wastewater treatment plant in Mexicali on March 16, 2007. The President was accompanied by Governor of Baja California Eugenio Elorduy, as well as representatives from the North American Development Bank (NADBank) and the Japanese Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC). On June 28, 2007, EPA Administrator Steven Johnson, EPA Regional Administrator Wayne Nastri, and the Director of the Border Environmental Cooperation Commission (BECC) Daniel Chacon also visited the new plant. Stopping in Calexico to visit the New River, Administrator Johnson witnessed first-hand the improvements to water quality that this project has generated. "As a result of these binational efforts, over 235,000 people have wastewater treatment service, and water quality in the New River has significantly improved," Johnson stated.

The New River was considered by many to be the most polluted in the United States. The river passes directly through two border sister-cities, and residents in both Mexicali and Calexico suffered the pervasive stench caused by the raw sewage. Those who came into direct contact with the river's water were exposed to high levels of pathogens. Finally, the untreated wastewater contributed large loads of nutrients to the Salton Sea, exacerbating the water quality problems in the Sea.

While the new treatment plant has been operational for only a short time, recent water quality data from the New River at the U.S. border indicate that concentrations of bacteria (fecal coliform) have dropped by 98%, dissolved oxygen levels have increased from an annual average of 1 mg/l to over 5 mg/l, and phosphate concentrations at the border have decreased by about 25%, reducing phosphate loads to the Salton Sea by 10%. (source: California Regional Water Quality Control Board).

EPA contributed $13 million from the Border Environmental Infrastructure Fund (BEIF) to the Comisión Estatal de Servicios Públicos de Mexicali (CESPM) (Mexicali's water and wastewater utility) for the construction of an upgraded pumping station, 16.7 miles of 48-inch diameter pressurized sewer line, and the new 20 mgd (880 lps) wastewater treatment plant, which is designed to treat flows up until the year 2014. The BEIF contribution was matched by funds from the government of Mexico. In addition, the Baja California State utility provider who constructed the plant, Comisión Estatal de Servicios Publicos, used a $4 million loan from the Japanese Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) to allow the $30 million project to proceed.

A binational technical committee, which helped CESPM to develop the project, consists of representatives from CESPM, EPA, the U.S. and Mexican Sections of the International Boundaries and Water Commission (IBWC and CILA, respectively), the Mexican Federal Water Commission (CONAGUA), State of Baja Water Commission (CEA), the Border Environmental Cooperation Commission (BECC), the California Regional Water Quality Control Board, the California State Water Resources Control Board, the NADBank, and the State of Baja's Environmental Protection Agency. This binational committee is currently developing other wastewater infrastructure projects in Mexicali, and EPA continues to work with Mexican authorities to address the discharges from slaughterhouses, agricultural runoff containing silt, fertilizers, and pesticides, and illicit disposal of solid and liquid wastes that continue to impair water quality in the New River. ■

Safe Drinking Water for Baja California Indigenous Communities

by Linda Reeves, EPA Region 9

The Baja California indigenous communities of San Antonio Necua and San Jose de la Zorra now have safe drinking water, thanks to a binational collaborative project with strong support from Mexico's Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples (CDI). This project was the result of years of effort by Mexican and U.S. tribes, grassroots organizations, government agencies and volunteers working together to provide safe drinking water for native Baja Californians.

"After years of advocating for improved water systems, it's amazing to see these major improvements in services for the indigenous communities, and especially to realize what can be accomplished through organizations and individuals dedicated to binational cooperation," commented Mike Wilken of the Native Cultures Institute of Baja California, a Mexican-based nonprofit organization known as CUNA.

Indigenous communities comprise 10% of the Baja California Border region's land, with a population of approximately 1200. Most communities are isolated, lacking indoor plumbing, electricity and year-round vehicular access.

Beginning in 1996, CUNA, the Campo Kumeyaay Nation in the U.S., and the Baja California indigenous communities conducted initial water quality testing through a grant from the Border 2012 program. CUNA organized the participation of Mexican indigenous leaders in tribal caucus meetings held in the U.S., strengthening the bonds between indigenous groups separated by the international border.

In 2004, EPA provided funds to the Pala Band of Mission Indians in the U.S. to further assess the untreated, shallow hand-dug wells and surface water supplies for the communities. E. coli bacteria was found in the drinking water supplies for six of the seven communities. Drinking water for three communities, including San Jose de la Zorra, exceeded EPA's ambient water quality criteria and would not even be considered safe for swimming in the U.S.

Based on these test results, CDI contributed over $900,000 (in U.S. dollars) to build new drinking water systems, and Border 2012 provided $66,000 to support Mexico's efforts.

"With the support from Mexico and the U.S.-based tribes, EPA will be able to provide badly needed clean water for the families of the Kumeyaay Indians of Baja California," said Linda Reeves of EPA. "Clean water infrastructure is a long-term investment because better environmental health today means healthier families tomorrow."

Lenore Volturno, Environmental Director for the Pala Tribe, has long been an advocate for greater cross-border collaboration between tribal communities. "Pala appreciates the opportunity to help tribes in Mexico improve their water systems and have access to safe drinking water," commented Volturno. "All tribes deserve the opportunity to protect public health in their communities."

Through Border 2012 an additional $154,915 will provide safe drinking water to indigenous communities in Baja California, Mexico. These funds will provide training for the communities of San Jose de la Zorra and San Antonio Necua on how to properly operate and maintain newly installed drinking water systems, and construct additional water infrastructure improvements for Baja's indigenous communities.

For more information, please contact Linda Reeves, EPA Pacific Southwest/Region 9, at 415-972-3445 or by email at reeves.linda@epa.gov. To view a copy of the water quality assessment report, please visit Aqualink's website at **www.aqualink.org**, or contact Kathleen Coates Hedberg, kchedberg@cox.net, 619-660-7487 in La Mesa, California Javier Ceseña of CUNA can be reached at cunabc@telnor.net and (011-52) 646-178-8780. Lenore Volturno of the Pala Band of Mission Indians can be contacted at 760-891-3515. Paula Stigler can be reached at paula.stigler@gmail.com or at 619-865-3834. Hiram Sarabia of UCSD's Superfund Basic Research Program and the JA JAN Coalition can be contacted at hsarabia@ucsd.edu and 619-675-2665. ■

New Release of Border 2012 Implementation and Mid-Term Report

By Nick Martorano, EPA Region 9 Intern

2006 was the mid-point of the 10-year U.S.-Mexico binational environmental agreement, Border 2012. This progressive and ambitious agreement set forth six goals and twenty-three objectives to be completed by 2012.

Border 2012 Goals:

1. Reduce Water Contamination
2. Reduce Air Pollution
3. Reduce Land Contamination
4. Improve Environmental Health
5. Reduce Exposure to Chemicals (from accidental releases and/or acts of terrorism)
6. Improve Environmental Performance through Compliance, Enforcement, Pollution Prevention, and Environmental Stewardship

The midterm of the agreement provides an opportunity for both countries to look back at the progress and accomplishments achieved thus far, as well as look at lessons learned with an eye toward making amendments and improvements to the original agreement.

The recently released U.S.-Mexico Environmental Program: Border 2012 Implementation and Mid-Term Report looks at some of the many accomplishments achieved along the border, organized by the goals listed above. Each section details two to three projects and the progress made toward achieving Border 2012 goals and objectives. For example, Goal 3, Objective 3, states

"By 2010, clean up three of the largest sites that contain abandoned waste tires in the U.S.-Mexico border region, based on policies and programs developed in partnership with local governments."

So far, two of the three largest tire piles, INNOR and Centinela, have been cleaned up, with more than 1.6 million tires removed. The cleanup of the largest pile located in Ciudad Juarez is currently underway. Other key project accomplishments include site stabilization of the hazardous waste site Metales y Derivados, the creation of drinking water and wastewater infrastructure for several indigenous communities in Baja California, development of the binational ambient air monitoring network, and the signing of Emergency Contingency plans by all 14 sister cities. In addition to project results, the report illustrates challenges along the border, past investments, and continued needs for additional resources.

Border-wide partnerships and binational collaborations have been instrumental in the Border 2012 Program and are highlighted throughout the report. Additionally, throughout the report, a detailed timeline featuring important milestones, events, meetings and accomplishments allows the reader to recognize the program's overall accomplishments in the past five years. The report is also filled with

colorful photos and reader-friendly language aimed at reaching a wide audience. For additional information on the Border 2012 Program and to obtain a copy of the Implementation and Mid-Term Report, please go to the EPA Web site at **www.epa.gov/border2012** ■

National Coordinators Meet in San Antonio

On May 22-24, 2007, the fourth annual National Coordinators' Meeting (NCM) was hosted in San Antonio, Texas. The NCM focused on Border 2012's accomplishments to date; the launching of the Border 2012 mid-term and implementation report; and discussion of mid-course refinements needed to enhance the Border 2012 program. A few examples of environmental progress made thus far, included:

- The cleanup and removal of over 3 million tires that posed public health risk. Tires were used as fuel or in highway paving projects. Two of the tire piles (Centinella and Innor) were located west of Mexicali.
- Between 2003 and 2005, EPA's Border Environment Infrastructure Fund funded projects for creating and improving drinking water and wastewater infrastructure (including funds for the construction of the Las Arenitas wastewater treatment plant in Mexicali) that serves over 1.5 million people,
- More than 2000 tons of hazardous waste was cleaned up from the abandoned "Metales and Derivados" lead recovery facility in Tijuana, Baja California. Site clean-up decreased the risk of lead contamination to residents of a community of more than 10,000 people near the facility.

Finally, participants made key recommendations on refining the Border 2012 program, including redefining objectives, re-establishing bridges in communications, and new approaches. Both countries signed a Joint Communiqué re-affirming their commitment and collaboration towards protecting the environment and human health along the U.S.-Mexico border. The communiqué also acknowledged the participation and contribution from tribal and indigenous communities along both sides of the border. The communiqué can be found at EPA's Border 2012 website at **www.epa.gov/border2012** ■

Session at National Coordinators' Meeting in San Antonio

Mexico Announces National Emissions Inventory

(Reprinted from* TRIO*, Newsletter of the North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation)

Mexico's first national inventory for air emissions is an accomplishment with ramifications for all of North America because it will help normalize such data across the continent and lead to greater cooperation to combat air pollution.

The inventory presents, for the first time, detailed air emissions data from all 32 states and 2,443 municipalities in Mexico for six contaminants that contribute to smog and other air pollution: nitrogen oxides, sulfur oxides, volatile organic compounds, carbon monoxide, ammonia, and particulate matter.

Richard Halvey of the U.S. Western Governors' Association, a partner in the development of the national inventory, says "The inventory is a symbol of what cooperation and teamwork can achieve, as well as a tool for improving the health of Mexican citizens."

The inventory uses data from 1999 for five types of sources: fixed sources (such as industrial facilities), area sources (such as small industries and services), motor vehicles that travel on roads and highways, mobile sources that do not normally circulate on roads or highways (for example, agricultural machinery and construction equipment), and natural sources (such as volcanoes and vegetation).

"Through the inventory we can see that in all of the country's urban zones, on-road mobile sources are the greatest source of worrisome contaminants, whereas in the big industrial corridors the biggest sources of contamination are fixed, such as factories and industrial sites," explains Adrián Fernández Bremauntz, president of Mexico's National Institute of Ecology (INE).

Therefore, the inventory is set to become a basic tool in the management of Mexico's air quality. The publication of this inventory also represents an important step towards institutionalizing the collecting, reporting and analyzing of data on atmospheric emissions in Mexico, and putting that information at the disposal of the public.

Since the initial resolution, the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) has contributed financial support and expertise to the development of the air emissions inventory in Mexico, sponsored workshops involving inventory developers from each Mexican state, and promoted training of state officials on the reporting requirements of the new, mandatory industrial pollution reporting system—the Registro de Emisiones y Transferencia de Contaminantes.

And it seems the new inventory is already having an impact on policy thinking.

SEMARNAT and INE identified some policy challenges and opportunities presented by the document, including speeding up the substitution of "cleaner" fuels for coal and combustible oil, stricter emissions standards for new vehicles and better verification programs for vehicles already in use, as well as a need to stop and reverse deforestation.

"Mexico is the only developing country that has managed to collate this type of information up until now, so we should be proud of what we have achieved," affirms Dr. Fernández.

The full report is available at **www.ine.gob.mx** ■

Workshop on Spent Lead Acid Batteries and Electronic Waste to be Held in Tijuana

The U.S.-Mexico Border 2012 Program, together with the North American Commission on Environmental Cooperation, will hold a workshop in Tijuana on December 4-6, 2007, concerning two important waste streams—spent lead acid batteries (SLAB's) and electronic waste (e-waste). Both of these waste streams are commonly imported and exported among the United States, Mexico, and Canada. If handled improperly, the hazardous materials contained within these products can have a negative impact on human health and the environment. Consequences range from contaminated operating facilities to human exposure to heavy metals like mercury, lead and cadmium to environmental damage from air and water pollution.

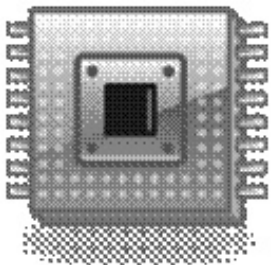
The objectives of this free workshop are to:

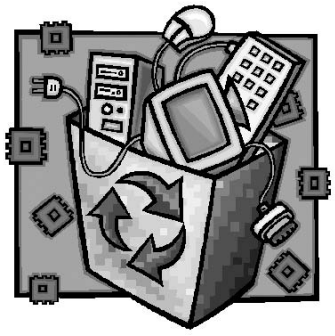
- Foster more effective methods of addressing hazards associated with the collection, transportation, storage, recycling, and disposal of e-waste and SLAB's;
- Increase compliance assistance with the proper management of e-waste and SLABs; and
- Improve tracking of these streams across the U.S., Mexican, and Canadian borders.

The first day of the workshop will focus on SLAB's, addressing such issues as regulations for SLAB's, proper storage and transportation of SLAB's, and best practices for recycling. The second and third days will focus on e-waste and will address collection and recycling of e-waste, e-waste regulations, purchasing greener electronics, and reuse through developing markets and charitable donations, among others. Speakers at the workshop will be from government, industry, and academia.

The workshop will be held at the Grand Hotel Tijuana. To learn more about SLAB's and e-waste and to register for this workshop go to: **www.epa.gov/ecycling/slabsworkshop.htm**

The workshop is free and simultaneous translation will be provided. ■





Air Quality Monitoring Network Transferred to the Secretariat of Environmental Protection for the State of Baja California

by Emmanuelle Rapicavoli, EPA Region 9, and Israel Flores, Secretariat for Environmental Protection, State of Baja California

At a ceremony on March 15, 2007 in Tijuana, Mexico, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the California Environmental Protection Agency (Cal/EPA) transferred ownership and operation of all air monitoring equipment comprising the California-Mexico Air Monitoring Network to the Secretariat of Environmental Protection (SPA) for the state of Baja California, Mexico.

Under the agreement, the Secretariat of Environmental Protection for the State of Baja California will assume operation of the air monitoring network with the continued technical support of the EPA, Cal/EPA, the National Institute of Ecology (INE) and the Secretariat of the Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT).

"The transfer of air monitoring equipment underscores EPA's commitment to provide technical support to Mexico and to the border states as they develop their air pollution control programs," said Wayne Nastri, Regional Administrator, EPA Region 9. "Today's agreement reflects the strong binational partnership that protects the environment along the U.S.-Mexico Border."

"We have had a very productive relationship with EPA thru the Border 2012 Program. Monitoring air quality in the Baja border region is one of the issues we have successfully worked on together. Today we not only celebrate the transfer of the air monitoring network, but also recognize the hard work and dedication from all parties involved," said Enrique Villegas, Secretary of the Baja California Secretariat for Environmental Protection. "We are committed to continuing to work together on matters that are of great concern for both our countries such as air quality along our common border."

Since 1995 the California Air Resources Board (CARB), part of Cal/EPA, has managed the California-Mexico Air Monitoring Network with funding from EPA. The monitoring network consists of 13 stations located in Tijuana, Playas de Rosarito, Tecate and Mexicali that monitor ambient air and generate air quality data for ozone, nitrogen oxides, fine particulate matter, sulfur dioxides, carbon monoxide and various meteorological parameters (see diagram below). Data from the network has been used to target efforts to improve air quality and public health in the region.

"The successful transfer of the monitoring equipment done here today will enhance the availability of air quality data to United States and Mexican authorities, allowing for a better understanding of the causes and severity of air pollution in the border region," said Ricardo Martinez, Assistant Secretary for Border Affairs for Cal/EPA. Martinez is responsible for managing California's Border Environmental Program. "We will be able to develop effective air pollution reduction programs, and measure progress toward our air quality goals."

In July 2004 EPA, SEMARNAT, Cal/EPA and the SPA announced a Memorandum of Cooperation on air quality monitoring that established specific commitments for each agency, with the ultimate goal of transferring the air monitoring network to SPA. This memorandum required the development of an action plan to assign responsibility for the operation of the monitoring stations once ownership is transferred to the State of Baja California.

In order to achieve this goal, the agencies formed a monitoring transfer workgroup, which prepared for the transfer through meetings, information exchanges and coordinated projects. These included several technical training sessions on the operation of the air monitoring stations, data review and validation given by CARB to SPA's air monitoring staff.

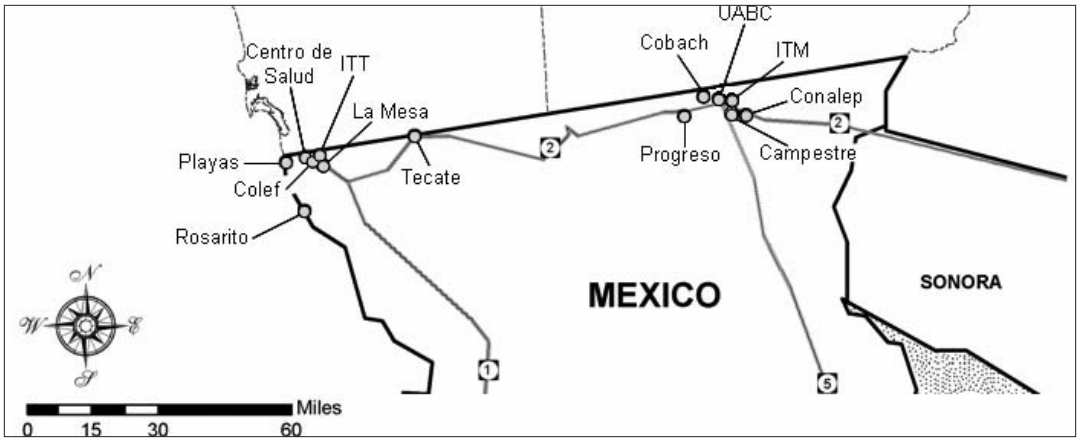
In addition, last year the workgroup created a real-time air quality website (http://aire.bajacalifornia.gob.mx) which displays air quality and health information for eight monitoring sites in Tijuana, Tecate, Rosarito, and Mexicali. The website provides air quality information to the public, allowing schools and local media to take necessary precautions when air pollution reaches unhealthy levels in their region.

In anticipation of the transfer, EPA in 2006 conducted a series of performance audits of the network, providing an opportunity to review the data quality and identify opportunities for improvements. As a result of EPA's initial audit, CARB was able to make many upgrades to the monitors, thus improving data quality prior to the transfer.

The workgroup also developed a three-year financial plan to fund the operation and maintenance of the monitoring stations. This funding plan, which forms part of the action plan signed on March 15, establishes commitments from each agency to support the network's operation and maintenance. According to the plan, SPA assumed responsibility for the network on April 1, 2007. Continuing in 2008, SPA will also be responsible for the air quality data management. By 2009, SPA will provide new equipment and replacement parts for the network. During this three-year transition period, EPA's Pacific Southwest Regional Office, Cal/EPA, SEMARNAT, and INE will continue various activities to support the network.

The transfer reflects the cooperation of local, state and federal agencies from the U.S. and Mexico, including EPA, Cal/EPA, SEMARNAT, INE, and SPA for more than a decade. The agreements signed on March 15, 2007 in Tijuana will continue the exchange of air quality information and technology in the Tijuana/San Diego and Mexicali/Imperial Valley regions.

"Air sampling is needed to preserve, control, and mitigate the harmful effects caused by air pollution on the people and environment of Baja California," said Ana Maria Contreras Vigil, Director of SEMARNAT's Office of Air Quality. "With this transfer of air sampling equipment by Cal/EPA and EPA, SEMARNAT pledges to continue improving border air quality." ■



Location of air monitoring stations in northern Baja California

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